



Waves of Change: Army Transformation at Aberdeen Proving Ground Reaches Technical Escort Unit

by Jeff Smart and Cathy Kropp

For some it was a sad occasion, an end to a well-known U.S. Army Materiel Command organization. For others it was a beginning, the activation of new U.S. Army Forces Command units and another step forward in the Army's overall transformation. The ceremony at Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland's Fanshaw Field on October 15, 2004 was all those things and more.

Officially, the permanent orders state an organization was discontinued and another was activated. Unofficially, a transformation occurred and members of the organization saw the U.S. Army Technical Escort Unit (TEU) transformed into the 22d Chemical Battalion.

The TEU started out as an interim organization, expected to be in place only a short time to meet an immediate need, but when finally discontinued, it ended with a long, distinguished history.

During World War II, there was a need for an organization with the right training, equipment and personnel to handle the movement of hazardous chemical weapons. In addition to knowing the effects and dangers of the agent and how to move hazardous material without accidents, those personnel needed to know what to do in case of an accident.

The Chief of the Chemical Warfare Service established that special unit on January 20, 1943 at Camp Sibert, Alabama. A little over a year later, the organization moved its operations to the Chemical Warfare Center in Maryland, formerly known as Edgewood Arsenal. This was the beginning of the TEU.

Throughout its history, the organization changed its

structure and capabilities to align with the structure and capabilities required by the Army and the Nation.

By the end of World War II, the unit had accomplished 1,151 missions and had escorted over 848,000 tons of material. On some of the missions, teams traveled over 300,000 miles and had circled the world. After the war, the unit received a Meritorious Unit Commendation for performing 847 missions without serious injury during the period May 31, 1944 to December 31, 1945.

After the end of hostilities, the unit faced total demobilization as the need for chemical weapons movements appeared to be ending. Lt. Col. Garland White, the first commander of the unit and an experienced chemical officer, took immediate action to keep the unit together by expanding its mission to include the disposal of chemical weapons.

In 1946, the unit received its first major disposal mission. Sixty-four unit personnel were sent to Germany to dispose of captured chemical munitions. One of the first issues Lt. Col. White faced was that the unit had no experience, training or equipment to handle the deadly nerve agents developed by Germany during the war. To solve part of the problem, he helped design the first nerve agent first aid kit. In April 1946, the Surgeon General officially approved the kit. The first 25 kits produced went with the team deploying to Germany.

In July 1946, a cargo ship, the S.S. Francis L. Lee, was loaded with 700 tons of German mustard agent bombs and sent to the United States for analysis. Due to poor loading and storage operations, several of the bombs leaked during the crossing and contaminated the hold



The transformation of the Technical Escort Unit into the 22d Chemical Battalion was marked by a ceremony at Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland, on October 15, 2004.

Tech Escort *cont.*

A 1970 revision (PL 91-441) permitted "research and development quantities under one liter" of agent to be transported around the country and allowed for emergency disposal where the health and safety of humans was endangered. At the same time, President Richard M. Nixon ended the biological agent production program and stopped the production of unitary chemical munitions.

In 1971, the unit was tasked with escorting chemical weapons from Okinawa to Johnston Island, a small island in the Pacific Ocean about 800 miles southwest of Honolulu. More than 12,000 tons of chemical munitions were moved without incident during this movement known as Operation Red Hat or Kalama Express. In addition, the unit trained the personnel involved with handling and storing the munitions on the island.

Officials at Dugway Proving Ground, Utah, requested assignment of a TEU detachment to their installation in 1975 to help with installation restoration and the demilitarization of chemical munitions. The unit retained its detachment at Rocky Mountain Arsenal.

The unit helped conduct Operation SETCON I and II, an operation that located and moved more than 20,000 chemical training sets from storage sites around the world to Rocky Mountain Arsenal for demilitarization. Unit personnel escorted all convoys and airlifts and maintained custody of the sets from start to finish.

The Drill and Transfer System (DATS) was designed to provide a transportable field system for the demilitarization of leaking chemical munitions and recovered chemical weapons. In 1980, the TEU assumed responsibility for running the DATS and provided a team to operate the system as it moved to each chemical munition depot. After the start-up work at Dugway Proving Ground, it moved to Pine Bluff Arsenal, Arkansas; Anniston Army Depot, Alabama; Lexington-Bluegrass Depot Activity, Kentucky; Umatilla Army Depot, Oregon; and Pueblo, Colorado.

Operation Rocky Mountain Transfer, in August 1981, involved the movement of 888 nerve agent bombs, called Weteye

bombs, from Rocky Mountain Arsenal to Tooele Army Depot, South Area, Utah. This was the largest air movement of chemical weapons in history. The bombs were flown aboard Army transports to Dugway Proving Ground and then shipped by truck to Tooele. More than 75 TEU personnel participated in the three-week movement.

With the termination of chemical storage activity at Rocky Mountain Arsenal, the unit detachment assigned there was removed in July 1985. To provide greater chemical accident and incident response, new unit detachments were established at Umatilla Depot Activity and Anniston Army Depot in 1986.

In June 1987, the unit received the Army Superior Unit Award as recognition for completing difficult and challenging missions during peacetime. The unit was one of the first to receive the new award. The unit was specifically commended for the completion of four operations in the United States and Germany from May to November 1986. Each operation posed potential health hazards and TEU executed all missions without incident.

Also in 1987, the unit began supporting the U.S. Secret Service on protective service VIP missions. These missions provided protection to U.S. Government officials such as the President and Vice President, and to other dignitaries, to include various leaders of foreign countries.

Starting in 1988, the Army decided to transfer a large portion of their military personnel from administrative positions to field positions. The TEU had to either contract out for support or convert military positions to civilian personnel. The unit chose the latter course and the first hiring took place in October. Many former and retired military were hired on as civilians, but due to the extensive training required to prepare the civilians for escort work, the first trained civilians began operations in February 1989.

In 1990, the unit conducted a historically significant project called Operation Golden Python. The project, also known as Operation Steel Box, involved moving over 100,000 toxic chemical artillery projectiles from the Federal Republic of Germany to Johnston Island.

1980 Drill and Transfer System (DATS)
TEU assumes responsibility for running the Drill and Transfer System.



1987 Recovery operations in Guam, Korea, Japan, and NAS Alameda California earn the unit its first Army Superior Unit Award.

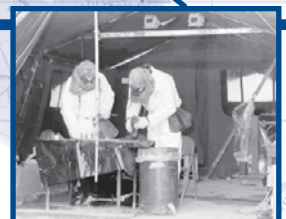
1981 Operation Rocky Mountain Transfer
TEU executes the largest air movement of chemical weapons in history, transporting nerve agent bombs from Rocky Mountain Arsenal to Tooele Army Depot.



1989-1990 Operation Golden Python
Over 100,000 chemical artillery projectiles are moved from Germany to Johnston Island, earning the unit its second Superior Unit Award.

1993 Operation Safe Removal

TEU receives its third Army Superior Unit Award for the recovery of 147 World War I era munitions at the Spring Valley site in Washington, D.C.



Tech Escort *cont.*

During Operation Desert Shield/Storm in 1990-1991, the unit supported operations in Southwest Asia. Most of the work after the start of the ground war in January 1991 involved receiving, packaging for transport, and escorting potential chemical or biological samples back to the United States for examination. Following the successful conclusion of the military campaign, the unit was asked to support the United Nations' Special Commission (UNSCOM), established to implement Security Council resolutions concerning Iraq and its weapons of mass destruction. The TEU also provided explosive ordnance disposal experts to serve with the Baghdad Monitoring and Verification Center in Iraq.

In January 1993, the unit responded to one of its most challenging assignments, the recovery of World War I chemical weapons from a construction site in Washington, D.C. The chemical munitions were buried shortly after World War I when a chemical testing area adjacent to American University was shut down. The site remained untouched until 1993 when the pit was discovered while digging a sewer line for a new house under construction. The cleanup of this area continues today as research concludes more land was a part of this World War I test area.

Operation Safe Removal recovered a number of items from the pit. Of these, most were non-chemical weapons or scrap metal. Thirty-five projectiles, however, were determined to be liquid filled and were carefully moved to Pine Bluff Arsenal for storage. A few were sent for analysis and at least one still contained potent mustard agent.

It was during 1995, when the threat of terrorist use of weapons of mass destruction brought the unit to the attention of the Nation's military leadership. The unit commanders of that era developed plans to redesign the unit and make it better prepared to support these threats. The mission expanded to include support to the United Nations Inspection teams, Federal Bureau of Investigation, other government agencies, states and cities, as well as combatant commanders in operations overseas, such as Bosnia and Southwest Asia.

With new capabilities, the TEU was a force of choice for National Special Security Events including the 1996 Atlanta, Georgia Olympic Games, the Denver Summit of the Eight, the

National Boy Scout Jamboree, political conventions, the Inauguration, and the State of the Union address.

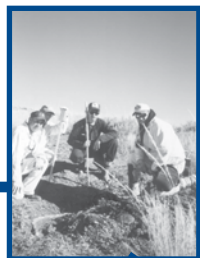
The unit supported training of the first responders of 120 major cities in the United States as part of the Domestic Preparedness Program. This new requirement was added on at a time when the unit was fully employed supporting the remediation of Formerly Used Defense Sites and emergency responses.

Another significant response was Operation Glove box, which involved handling 2,700 biological bomblets found at Wright Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio. To help meet the requirements for the services provided by this unique unit, the Army recommended an initial increase of personnel, the beginnings of new growth that continues today.

In addition to the battalion headquarters and companies at the Edgewood Area of Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland, the unit retained companies at Dugway Proving Ground and Pine Bluff Arsenal. These multiple locations provided regionalized response to both the homeland and overseas. In 2000, another company was formed in the National Capital Region to allow for quick response there.

Near the end of 2000, the unit was called to Rocky Mountain Arsenal where six GB (Sarin-filled) bomblets were uncovered during a remediation project, attracting National media attention. A new procedure and technology, the transportable Explosive Destruction System, was used to safely dispose of the bomblets on site. TEU provided the explosive ordnance disposal operations expertise for the hazardous mission.

The horrendous events of September 11, 2001, and the demand for TEU services that followed, significantly increased the operational tempo of the unit. TEU teams were called to Baltimore, Maryland and a variety of locations in Washington, D.C. Sampling teams were busy at the Pentagon and annexes, senate office buildings, the Capitol building and buildings on the White House complex. Members of the unit augmented the Secret Service Hammer Teams to conduct identification and sampling operations in support of the traveling Presidential Protective details. Other teams were deployed overseas in support of U.S. Central Command and other defense organizations. Team Eagle departed mid-October as the first team supporting Operation Enduring Freedom.



1998 TEU uncovers dinosaur bones while looking for recovered chemical warfare material at the former Black Hills Army Depot, South Dakota.

2000 Explosive Destruction System

The transportable Explosive Destruction System debuts, making it possible for the team to destroy Sarin bomblets on site at Rocky Mountain Arsenal.



2003 TEU provides monitoring support and Single Chemical Agent Identification Set (CAIS) Access and Neutralization System (SCANS) operations at Ft. McClellan, Alabama.

2001-2003 Teams are deployed to support the Global War on Terrorism.



2004 Tech Escort Unit is transformed into the 22d Chemical Battalion.

Tech Escort *cont.*

The unit has also been providing vital support to the demilitarization of the chemical agent stockpile stored at Aberdeen Proving Ground, monitoring the Chemical Agent Storage Yard at the Edgewood Area since October 2002. In April 2003, when the Aberdeen Chemical Agent Disposal Facility began operations, TEU teams moved the steel containers from the storage yard to the processing facility, and maintained a team on standby to respond to any accident or incident that might occur.

Over the next two years, teams were dispatched throughout the states to respond to recovered chemical warfare materiel and munitions found in West Virginia, Arkansas, Texas, Colorado, Alabama, California, Georgia, Maryland, Kansas, New Mexico, Utah, Delaware and South Dakota.

A team deployed to Salt Lake City, Utah to support the 2002 Olympics and shortly after another deployed to New Orleans, Louisiana to support Super Bowl XXXVI. More recent events include the G8 Conference in Georgia and the Democratic National Convention in Boston, Massachusetts. TEU has been supporting these kinds of National Special Security Events since 1996, as an emergency preparedness asset ready to deal with any chemical or biological events that might occur.

The TEU continued to deploy teams to support the War on Terrorism. At one point, six teams were located throughout the Central Command region. At the beginning of April, TEU deployed a team of a different sort to the Iraq region and Team Raptor began planning for future team deployments in support of the War on Terrorism. At the end of the month the first Chemical Biological Disablement and Elimination Team was deployed. The unit continues to send disablement and elimination teams overseas to support the War on Terrorism and is currently on their fifth rotation.

To assist with the increased operational tempo, workers from the Umatilla Chemical Depot, the 398th Chemical Company – a reserve unit based in Tennessee, the Army Reserve Unit for Consequence Management, and workers from the Blue Grass Chemical Activity in Kentucky augmented TEU teams. Although the manpower was a welcome relief, this meant some concentrated training efforts to get workers the skills and equipment experience needed to perform TEU operations. Once the surge ended, the augmentees returned home.

Remediation teams continue to support the Corps of Engineers at cleanup projects and Scoping Study sites throughout the United States. Teams support both field tests and operations using new technologies and equipment like the Product Manager for Nonstockpile Chemical Materiel's Pine Bluff Munitions Assessment System and the Single Chemical Agent Identification Set Access and Neutralization System. These partnerships enable the unit to maintain proficiency with hands-on real-world hazardous operations with the latest available technologies and equipment.

Although the name of the unit has now changed to the 22d Chemical Battalion, the unit will continue to be made up of both military and civilian technical specialists. The expertise, experience, and readiness that the Department of Defense has relied on in the past will continue to be available to combatant commanders and homeland defense in the future.

For additional information, please contact the 20th Support Command Public Affairs Office at (410) 436-6455.



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